

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 EA-11 NEA-10 ISO-00 AF-10 AID-20

CIAE-00 COME-00 FRB-02 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 TRSE-00

XMB-07 OPIC-12 SPC-03 CIEP-02 OMB-01 SCEM-02 INT-08

STR-08 SCI-06 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-10 PA-04

PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 DRC-01 /247 W

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R 050930Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7946

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS UNN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, PFOR, JA, XF

SUBJECT: JAPANESE PRESS TREATMENT OF THE OIL CRISIS

SUMMARY: SINCE THE OCT 17 OPEC AND OAPEC ANNOUNCEMENTS OF INCREASED PRICES AND REDUCED PRODUCTION OF CRUDE OIL, THE JAPANESE PRESS HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE FACTUAL COVERAGE TO THE OIL SITUATION AND TO GOJ EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH HIGHER PRICES AND POTENTIAL SHORTAGES. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN SUBSTANTIAL EDITORIAL COMMENT WHICH HAS FOCUSED ALMOST ENTIRELY ON THE NEED FOR THE GOJ TO DEVELOP EMERGENCY MEASURES TO LIMIT OIL CONSUMPTION AND TO INSULATE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ECONOMY FROM THE INFLATIONARY EFFECTS OF THE PRICE RISE. THE TONE HAS BEEN ONE OF GROWING CONCERN BUT NOT PANIC.

REMARKABLY, THERE HAVE BEEN NO DIRECT CALLS FOR JAPAN TO MOVE AWAY FROM ITS "NEUTRAL" MID-EAST FOREIGN POLICY AND VERY FEW EDITORIAL SUGGESTIONS THAT JAPAN "RETHINK" ITS POLITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ARAB STATES. RATHER, JAPAN IS DEPICTED BY ONE PAPER AS BEING IN AN "UTTERLY PASSIVE POSITION" AND HAVING TO RELY ON THE "POLITICAL POWER OF THE U.S." TO STABILIZE THE ME SITUATION AND RESTORE THE NORMAL FLOW OF OIL. IF THE OIL SHORTAGE BECOMES A REALITY RATHER THAN AN ABSTRACTION, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRESS IS LIKELY TO BECOME MORE STRIDENT AND THE PRESSURE ON THE GOJ TO TAKE SOME DRAMATIC POLITICAL INITIATIVE WILL INCREASE SHARPLY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE OUTBREAK OF THE ME WAR BROUGHT EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN

FROM THE PRESS ABOUT A POSSIBLE TEMPORARY INTERRUPTION OF OIL SUPPLIES BUT NEWSPAPERS TOOK COMFORT IN THE FACT THAT: (1) JAPAN'S MID EAST OIL CAME FROM THE PERSIAN GULF, AN AREA NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN HOSTILITIES; (2) JAPAN WAS NOT A POLITICAL TARGET OF THE ARABS; AND (3) JAPAN HAD PETROLEUM RESERVES TO COVER SHORT TERM INTERRUPTIONS. IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE OCT 17 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY OPEC AND OAPEC THAT THERE BEGAN TO BE EDITORIAL EXPRESSIONS OF REAL CONCERN ABOUT JAPAN'S IMMEDIATE SUPPLY SITUATION. THE OCT 19 MAINICHI SHIMBUN CALLED FOR A "WATER TIGHT COUNTER POLICY -- ASSUMING THE WORST CASE" AND NOTED THAT "OUR COUNTRY IS IN AN UTTERLY PASSIVE POSITION; ITS FREEDOM OF ACTION IS EXTREMELY LIMITED". ON THE SAME DAY THE SANKEI SAID THAT THERE IS THE "POSSIBILITY THAT THE BLOW TO OUR COUNTRY WILL BE BEYOND ALL IMAGINATION" AND NOTED THAT "IN A SUPPLY SQUEEZE IT WILL BE EASY FOR THE MAJORS TO GIVE PRIORITY TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES." OTHER EDITORIAL COMMENT SAID THAT THE EFFECT OF THE PRICE RISE WAS MORE SERIOUS THAN THE THREAT OF SUPPLY CURTAILMENT BECAUSE WITH THE END OF THE WAR "SUPPLIES WILL BE RESUMED BUT PRICES WILL STAY UP."

3. WITH THE END OF FIGHTING AND THE REALIZATION THAT THE CEASEFIRE WOULD NOT BRING A QUICK END TO THE CUT IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FLOW OF OIL, THE TONE OF NEWSPAPER COMMENT HAS BECOME MORE SERIOUS. THE KEIZAI NOTED THAT HERETOFORE THE GOJ HAD FOCUSED ONLY ON FINDING NEW SOURCES OF SUPPLY BUT NOW IT MUST ALSO DEVELOP PLANS FOR RESTRICTION CONSUMPTION. OTHER NEWSPAPERS CRITICIZED THE GOJ'S CASUAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PROBLEM AND URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO DISCLOSE THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF JAPAN'S PREDICAMENT. THE NOV 3 ASAHI SHIMBUN, NOTING THAT GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO SINK IN, CARRIED A LONG ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE INCREASED PRICE AND DECREASED

SUPPLY OF OIL IN JAPAN'S ECONOMY AND SOCIETY.

4. DESPITE THE GENERAL RECOGNITION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION AND THE GROWING REALIZATION THAT JAPAN'S "NEUTRAL" MID-EAST POLICY IS UNSATISFACTORY TO THE ARAB OIL PRODUCING STATES, THERE HAS BEEN NO DIRECT EDITORIAL URGING THAT JAPAN "TILT" ITS FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE ARABS. THE MAINICHI DID STATE ON OCT 26 THAT "IF JAPAN IS REGARDED BY ARAB STATES AS AN UNFRIENDLY COUNTRY, THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD START DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO REVERSE THIS MISUNDERSTANDING". THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN OCCASIONAL EDITORIAL STATEMENTS THAT JAPAN MAY HAVE TO "RETHINK" ITS ENERGY DIPLOMACY", BUT MOST COMMENT HAS LIMITED ITSELF TO EMPHASIZING THE NEED TO DEEPEN ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH THE OIL PRODUCING COUNTRIES WHILE CONTINUING TO COOPERATE WITH EUROPE, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE MAJORS. JAPAN IS DEPICTED BY THE PRESS AS BEING POWERLESS TO INFLUENCE EVENTS IN THE ME DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT IS THE WORLD'S BIGGEST IMPORTER OF OIL AND AS HAVING TO RELY ON THE SUPER POWERS TO BRING ABOUT THE STABILITY IN THE AREA THAT WILL RESTORE THE FULL FLOW OF OIL. IN THE WORDS OF THE ASAHI SHIMBUN, "JAPAN HAS THE MOST TO LOSE IN A SCRAMBLE FOR OIL SO IT SHOULD BE THE LAST TO START SUCH A RIVALRY."

COMMENT: THE RELATIVE RESTRAINT WITH WHICH THE JAPANESE PRESS HAS HANDLED THE OIL CRISIS UP TO NOW IS LARGELY ATTRIBUTABLE TO: (1) FACT THAT SUPPLY SHORTAGES HAVE NOT ACTUALLY HIT JAPAN; AND (2) PURPOSEFUL MODERATE GOJ STANCE DOWNPLAYING PREPARATION OF CONTINGENCY PLANS, AND SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION. (3) THE CONTINUED HOPE THAT WITH CURRENT DIPLOMATIC LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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EFFORTS SOMEHOW A STABLE PEACE CAN BE ACHIEVED THAT WILL "DEPOLITICIZE" OIL. IF EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A LONG TERM SETTLEMENT IN THE ME FAIL, HOWEVER, AND OIL SHORTAGES BECOME A REALITY RATHER THAN SPECULATIVE POSSIBILITY, THE PRESS MAY WELL CALL FOR SOME DRAMATIC CHANGE IN POLICY.
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